



## State of Connecticut

### HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STATE CAPITOL

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### **Testimony in support of HB 5421 AN ACT EXEMPTING DEATH CERTIFICATES OF MINORS FROM PUBLIC DISCLOSURE**

On the heels of the terrible tragedy in Newtown we are faced with many issues. While we as a legislature have focused our efforts on finding answers and crafting a legislative response to protect our children in the future, the town clerks in Newtown have focused their efforts on protecting the victims' families of the shooting by protecting the release of information contained in the death certificates that will be used to fuel the media circus in Newtown.

It makes good sense to me that we protect at least some of the information contained on all death certificates, especially for minors. We already protect birth certificates from release, which arguably reduces the threat of identity theft. Why shouldn't we protect against those who would take advantage of a death to create a new identity? And why shouldn't we protect families of the deceased from having the media seek out the grave of a loved one because it makes great footage?

As part of the solution to this issue, the members of the General Assembly from Newtown are supporting HB 5733 An Act Concerning Access To A Child's Death Certificate, which is currently before the Public Health Committee. The goal of this legislation is to define the circumstances where a Town Clerk can release Death Certificates and circumstances where the release can be limited. Limited release of the information on a "short form" would protect vital information, such as Mother's maiden name and the location of burial. **HB 5421 would close a loophole to access death certificates through the FOI process.**

I am aware of significant concerns regarding the protection of death certificates. There are those in various agencies and the media who believe they have a duty to uncover situations where deaths have occurred under questionable circumstances. This is even more of an issue for children, who are not as likely to die from natural causes. The goal HB 5733 is to allow for full transparency regarding the types of information reasonable for public scrutiny, such as the name of the decedent, time and location of death, and the manner of death.

I appreciate the attention of the committee on this important issue. The tragedy in Newtown has forced us to look at an issue that could affect any family in the future. I hope the members see the opportunity that lies before us to fight back against identity theft and protect the memories of those who perished. I urge the members of the committee to support HB 5421, and make the bill effective upon passage.